A NEW VIEW OF THE ACTOR'S ART

SARAH BERNHARDT at the PALACE THEATRE ©by Rochlitz Studio

THE attempt to make Strindberg the successor to Henrik Ibsen did not succeed. So the theatre has remained without a Scandinavian idol for the precious, although the Strindberg theatre is not unknown here.

The theories of the author on acting are interesting and less revolutionary than his ideas of the drama. It has been said that those who do not enjoy the plays of Strindberg had the disadvantage of seeing them acted by other players than those of Swedish birth. The dramatist writes:

The art of the actor is the most difficult and at the same time the easiest of all arts. But it is like all beauty, almost impossible to define. It is not the art of dissimulation, for the great actor does not dissemble, instead of which he is sincere, true, undisguised. It is only the low comedian who does everything to disguise himself by mask and costume. It is not imitation, for bad actors often possess a demoniac ability to imitate well known personages, whereas the true artist lacks this gift. The actor is not entirely the medium of the poet, but only to a certain extent and with certain restrictions.

The art of the actor is not reckoned in æsthetics as one of the independent arts, but as one of the dependent ones. It cannot exist without the text of the poet. An actor cannot do without the poet, whereas the poet can do without the actor in a case of emergency. I have never seen a representation of the second part of Goethe's "Faust" nor Schiller's "Don Carlos" nor Shakespeare's "Tempest," but still I have seen them when I read them, and there are good plays which should not be performed; they cannot stand it; they cannot bear being seen. But there are many bad plays which must be played in order to live; they are only perfect through the art of the actor, and can thus be ennobled. The poet is generally aware of the thanks which is due to the actor, and he is usually grateful. The clever actor is also grateful to his poet, and I would like to see that they thank each other, since the obligations are mutual. But they would live in still better harmony if this uncalled for question was never put. But it is often brought up by conceited fools or by the stars when it happens that a play has been brought to honor which really deserved to sink. For such the poet is a necessary evil, or just somebody who is writing the text to their part, since there must be a text.

The art of the actor appears to be the easiest of all arts, since every man in everyday life can speak, walk, stand, make gestures and grimaces. But then he plays himself, his own part; and this very soon proves something different. If he is to learn a role and to represent it, and is admitted on the stage, it is soon noticeable that the most knowing, profound and strong character is impossible; whereas a very simple nature feels at home at once. To the one the art of representation is innate; others have not got this art. But it is always difficult to judge a beginner, for tendencies may exist without their being revealed immediately, and often great talents have had a very meagre beginning. Therefore director and regisseur must be very cautious in their judgment, for they hold the fate of a young man in their hands. They shall test and observe, have patience and leave the verdict to the future.

What really makes an actor and what qualities he must have is very difficult to say, but I will try to state a few.

At first he must have concentration, he must be able to concentrate his thoughts on his role and not permit himself to be diverted in the least. He who plays an instrument knows what it means when he lets his thoughts play about. Then the notes disappear, the fingers wander, make mistakes and halt, even when they know their piece.

The second condition is to possess imagination; that means here to be able to realize expression and situation in such a vivid manner that they can take form. I believe the artist is put into a sort of trance, forgets himself, and finally becomes the one whom he is to represent. This reminds one of somnambulism, but it is hardly the same. If he is disturbed in this condition, or is brought to consciousness, he stops—is lost. Therefore, I have always hesitated to interrupt a scene at a rehearsal. I have seen how the actor suffers when he is awakened; he stands there as if drunk with sleep, and it takes some time for him to fall asleep again, so to speak; to find the same atmosphere and tone.

CISSIE SEWELL in "HER REGIMENT"

No art is so unindependent as that of the actor; he cannot isolate his work of art; he cannot show it and say "This is mine." For instance, if he does not find resonance in his fellow actor he is not supported by him; he may be drawn down and tempted to fall into false notes; even when he does his best he is not likely to withstand this influence. The actors are in each other's power; they are unusual egotists, who wish to play the rival down, to force him into the background in order to appear themselves and alone in the foreground.

Therefore the spirit of good understanding among the actors is of the greatest importance in the theatre, if the play is to have effect and become prominent. The actors must subject themselves and subject others; they must fall in line and work together, but principally they must work in harmony. That is expecting a good deal of men, especially in a field of work where worthy ambition urges every one to make himself noticeable and to earn the appreciation and win the well deserved prize by permitted means.

If an actor has imagined vividly the character and scene which he is to represent, the next thing that he must do is to learn his part. That begins with the spoken word, and I consider that that is the most important part in scenic art. If the tone is correct the gesture, the movements, the position and the attitudes follow in sequence if the gift of representation (imagination) is developed energetically. If this is lacking then the arms and hands hang like lifeless things; the body is as dead, and only a speaking head appears on a lifeless figure. This is usually the case with a beginner. The word—the spoken word—has not had the power to penetrate the body and to bring about all the necessary connections. But false contacts can also originate, muscles can act out of place, sprawl and move; fingers are drawn and the feet are continually looking for new positions without finding repose or proper attitudes. The actor is nervous and disquiets the public. Therefore it is not of small importance that he keeps his body healthy, so that he has it under control.

The actor shall control his part and shall not be controlled by it. That means that he is not to let himself be carried away or intoxicated by the words—that he is not to lose consciousness. He shall pay attention to himself; he shall not allow himself to be overpowered by the words, and this can only be when his role comes naturally from his memory and has entered into the art of representation or imagination. Then the role is really rooted in him and consciousness stands sentinel. A role that has entered no deeper than the memory sounds hollow.

The actor must be strong, so that he is not influenced by his fellow actors and will not permit himself to be tempted into their sequence of tones.

The actor is an illusionist and is to give the illusion that he is some one else than he really is. If he has a strong, rich personality it penetrates and creates a plus which makes the great actor. It is this plus that is so difficult to be found and which cannot be learned. It is a general exaggeration of imagination, observation, feeling, taste and control.

200 Times of 'Cheer Up!'

On Tuesday of this week Charles Dillingham's stupendous pageant of many delights, "Cheer Up!" will reach its 200th presentation at the Hippodrome. In passing its second century milestone the current success at the big playhouse establishes an attendance record of historical interest and one which surpasses that of all its predecessors, for "Cheer Up!" is conceded to be the most popular Hippodrome spectacle ever presented, and its toll of over a million patrons to date has never before been equalled within the same length of time by any other theatrical indoor attraction in the world. The Hippodrome's big public has learned to know that Mr. Dillingham's policy is to give the maximum show for the minimum cost, and the present offering contains a composite and varied assortment of amusement on a huge scale which pleases every taste.

END OF K. & E.-HITCHCOCK SUIT

Injunction Proceedings Terminated in Philadelphia.

The injunction proceedings of Klaw & Erlanger and others against Raymond Hitchcock and others was settled by agreement in the Court of Common Pleas No. 1, Philadelphia, Pa., on Thursday morning shortly after the resumption of the examination of Raymond Hitchcock. On Wednesday testimony was offered to establish the fact that the booking arrangements of Klaw & Erlanger in some cases had been oppressive. Mr. Hitchcock in his testimony made no such charges and admitted, on the contrary, that his relations with the firm had been agreeable. After this Judge Francis Shunk Brown offered Mr. Hitchcock for identification and afterward read the following letter of May 17, addressed at the Lambs Club from Mr. Hitchcock to Mr. Erlanger:

"May 17, The Lambs, 130 West Forty-fourth street, New York.

"DEAR BOSS: A thousand thanks for your great kindness. Al called me up and I am to see him to-morrow morning. He thinks he can arrange the Knickerbocker Theatre, and don't forget I am conscious of that splendid favor in letting me have Julian Mitchell.

"You won't remember it, but you offered me the first big salary I ever received, $90. That gave me an awful boost inside, and I could tell you lots of favors and help you have been, to not only me but hundreds of others that you have forgotten and live only in the hearts of the people you helped, but that's a lot, Boss, and it's worth having lived. Yours always,

"RAYMOND HITCHCOCK.

"To A. L. ERLANGER, Esq."

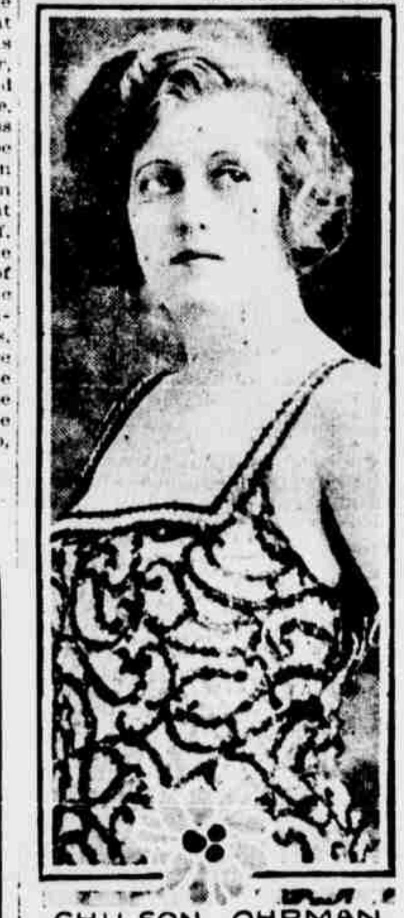
After handing it to Mr. Hitchcock, who looked it over, Judge Brown read it and asked Mr. Hitchcock if these were still his sentiments, to which witness replied in the affirmative.

Mr. Hitchcock further stated that he had no contract to play anywhere under the Shuberts except in Philadelphia, and he did not consider that clause in the contract giving them control of his bookings elsewhere to be binding, and as Mr. Shubert had admitted the day before that he did not consider the clause binding Judge Brown said, "Then why do you gentlemen not get together?" Upon this suggestion Mr. Erlanger and Mr. Hitchcock had a conference, and it was agreed that Mr. Hitchcock should play under the bookings arranged by Klaw & Erlanger after his Philadelphia engagement, and the case by mutual consent was dismissed.

In speaking of the matter afterward Mr. Erlanger said: "We consider that more important than any injunction which any court might have given us, and now that we have had an admission that the clause is not good we shall erase it from our contracts hereafter."

Asked if this was the end of their differences with the Shuberts Mr. Erlanger said: "This has nothing to do with the case against the Shuberts except incidentally, and has no connection with the proceedings pending here against their prospective new theatre or their possession of the Chestnut Street Opera House. We consider our contract with the Shuberts violated and shall govern ourselves accordingly."

To Judge Patterson was denied the hearing of some illuminating and entertaining testimony, as Mr. Klaw arrived on the 11 o'clock train accompanied by C. B. Dillingham of the New York Hippodrome and Century; also Florenz Ziegfeld, Alf Hayman, George Tyler and J. Fred Zimmerman, Jr., all of whom were ready to testify in behalf of the plaintiff on a question of booking arrangements.

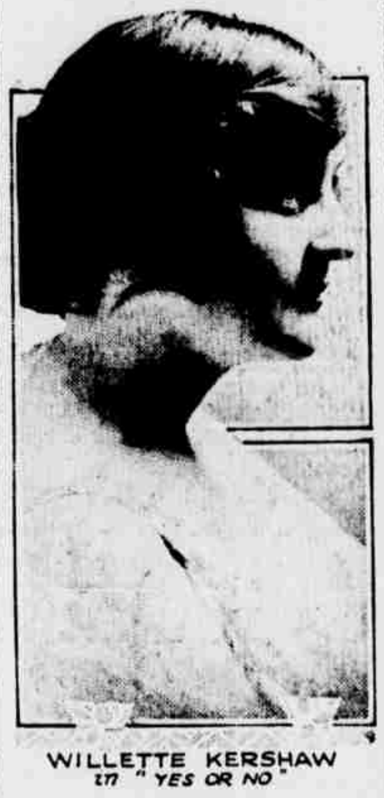


CHILSON OHRMAN in "DOING OUR BIT."

THE DIVINE SARAH IN 'PHEDRE'

She Will Play Scenes From Racine's Tragedy.

Sarah Bernhardt, her manager, William C. Connor, and the directorate of the Palace Theatre, are amazed by the great number of letters asking for this or that play in the vast Bernhardt repertoire. At least a score of seminary and prep school principals have requested that "Phedre" be included in the bill at the Palace, and Mme. Bernhardt, recalling that seminary misses have always delighted in her performance of Racine's still vital play, has promised to present it. As a result there will be many theatre parties made up of students of French who want to hear their Racine read in the voix d'or. As a matter of fact there is more of the historic Bernhardt in her performance of "Phedre" than in perhaps any other. It has been said of it:



WILLETTE KERSHAW in "YES OR NO"

"In writing 'Phedre' Racine anticipated Sarah Bernhardt. If the part had been made for her by a poet of our own days, it could not have been brought more perfectly within her limits, nor could it have more perfectly filled those limits to their utmost edge. It is one of the greatest parts in poetical drama, and it is written with a sense of the stage not less sure than his sense of dramatic poetry. There was a time when Racine was looked upon as old fashioned, as conventional, as frigid. It is realized nowadays that his verse has cadences like the cadences of Verlaine, that his language is as simple and direct as prose, and that he is one of the most passionate of poets. Of the character of *Phedre* Racine tells us that it is 'ce que j'ai peut-être mis de plus raisonnable sur le théâtre.' The word strikes oddly on our ears, but every stage of the passion of *Phedre* is indeed reasonable, logical as only a French poet, since the Greeks themselves, could make it. The passion itself is an abnormal, an insane thing, and that passion comes to us with all its force and all its perversity; but the words in which it is expressed are never extravagant, they are always clear, simple, temperate, perfectly precise and explicit.

"The art is an art exquisitely balanced between the conventional and the realistic, and the art of Sarah Bernhardt, when she plays the part, is balanced with just the same unerring skill. She seems to abandon herself wholly at times to her 'fureurs'; she tears the words with her teeth, and spits them out of her mouth like a wild beast ravening upon prey; but there is always dignity, restraint, a certain remoteness of soul, and there is always the verse, and her miraculous rendering of the verse, to keep Racine in the right atmosphere. Of what we call acting there is little, little change in the expression of the face. The part is a part for the voice, and it is only in 'Phedre' that one can hear that orchestra, her voice, in all its variety of beauty. In her modern plays, plays in prose, she is condemned to use only a few of the instruments of the orchestra; an actress must, in such parts, be conversational, and for how much beauty or variety is there room in modern conversation? But here she has Racine's verse, along with Racine's psychology, and the language has nothing more to offer the voice of a tragic actress. She seems to speak her words, her lines, with a kind of joyful satisfaction; all the artiste in her delights in the task. Her nerves are in it, as well as her intelligence, but everything is colored by the poetry, everything is subordinate to beauty.

"Well, she seems still to be the same *Phedre* that she was eleven years ago, as she is the same 'Dame aux Camelias.' Is it reality or illusion? Illusion, perhaps, but an illusion which makes itself into a very effectual kind of reality. She has played these pieces until she has got them, not only by heart, but by every nerve and by every vein, and now the ghost of the real thing is so like the real thing that there is hardly any telling the one from the other. It is the living on of a mastery once absolutely achieved, without so much as the need of a new effort."

A PLAY A WEEK.

John Barrymore will be seen in "Peter Ibbetson" to-morrow night at the Standard Theatre, and New York audiences will thus be enabled to witness again one of the most inspired and beautiful exhibitions of romantic acting that the contemporary stage offers. Constance Collier and the rest of the admirable company will also appear.

New York audiences cannot get enough of "The Man Who Came Back." The Seventh Avenue Theatre will this week try to supply the demand with the company headed by Henry Hull.

At the Bronx Opera House "The Very Idea" will be acted by the same players who were at the Astor Theatre in this amusing play.

TO GET A FARCE OVER.

By HALE HAMILTON.

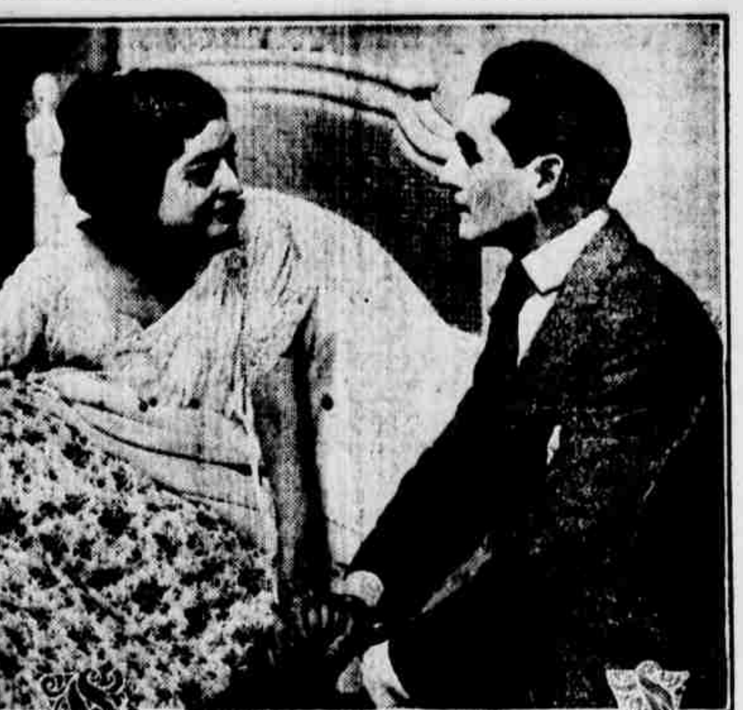
If there is a particular line of work an actor is called upon to do in the theatres that makes a greater demand on real acting ability it is playing farce. A sense of humor is a big institution. Many men and women think they have it. The idea is prevalent among them that appreciation of humor is as characteristic of the human race as any of the other features that distinguish the homo sapiens from other members of the animal kingdom.

The audiences arrive at the theatre, settle themselves in their seats and it is up to the actor in a farce to make them laugh. It may be that before coming to the theatre something has disturbed them, has given them food for thought, concentration of mind, and they are in anything but the mood for the humor and appreciation of the lines and situations intended by the author to be risible. If the laughs are not forthcoming the actor is assailed with the charge of incompetence; the manager glares at him and wonders how he ever earned a reputation as a laugh promoter; the author damns him as the responsible party for the killing of his play, and what can the actor do? He has to work that much harder in order to get his audience in a proper frame of mind to appreciate the humor of the play, regardless of the actor's efforts to create a change in mental conditions that will make the audience subconsciously enter into the spirit of the entertainment and become part of the atmosphere of the play.

Many years ago when I was just starting in this business I had tried and tried to get my audience and was almost on the point of letting things slide when an old actor said to me: "Pick somebody in the first five rows and play to that person. Take him into your confidence, just as if you were standing in your club and telling a joke to an old friend, who although the joke may be as old as time itself, is patient and tolerant and responds to your story with a laugh that you think is a result of your ability as a raconteur, but in fact he is laughing at, not with you."

Time and again after having an audience cold and unresponsive I have picked my man and played to him. Get him into a genial frame of mind; crack his frozen face until it melts into broad smiles and laughter. From this one unit the results of your efforts radiate to those sitting alongside of him and finally in the end you will have the whole house with you. This is one of the great secrets of acting farce successfully. It is no secret to the older members of the profession and many comedians are loath to give this valuable information to the young recruit who ofttimes learns the efficacy of picking his man after wallowing in the mire of despondency. But once having learned it it cultivates a spirit of never giving up because he knows out in front there is some one person who will act with him and make his part stand up if he can locate his man.

On the opening night of "What's Your Husband Doing?" George Hobart's farce that I am playing in at the Thirty-ninth Street Theatre, when I made my first entrance, before speaking a line I waited for quite some time to locate my audience. I wanted to be sure of getting over and I did not want to take a chance on playing at first to the audience as a whole. When I came off my scene several members of the company said: "What was the matter? First night fright?" "No," I replied, "I was looking around to find my tough subject among those out in front."



HELEN WESTLEY and FREDERICK ROLAND of the WASHINGTON SQUARE PLAYERS in "THE CRITICS COMEDY."